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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 BUCHAREST 001093

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DEPT FOR EUR/NCE - WILLIAM SILKWORTH

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [MOPS](#) [MARR](#) [NATO](#) [AF](#) [IZ](#) [RO](#)  
SUBJECT: PM TARICEANU TO AMBASSADOR -- "TIME HAS COME" FOR  
ROMANIA TO DISCUSS TROOP PULLOUT FROM IRAQ

REF: A) BUCHAREST 1081 B) BUCHAREST 1072 C) BUCHAREST

1058

Classified By: Ambassador Nicholas Taubman for Reasons 1.4(a), (b) and (d)

11. (C) Summary: Prime Minister Calin Popescu-Tariceanu told the Ambassador July 5 that he and his National Liberal Party (PNL) believed that "the time had come" for Romania to begin discussing a troop withdrawal from Iraq. Tariceanu stood by the proposal for a pullout he and Defense Minister Atanasiu had made on June 29, despite the resounding vote against the measure the following day in Romania's Supreme Council for National Defense (CSAT). Tariceanu promised a public debate on the issue, which he believed would eventually lead to sufficient pressure against the CSAT to reverse its decision. He promised to ensure the debate remained "constructive" and focused on Iraq, and believed a gradual withdrawal of Romanian troops could begin as early as January 2007. Ambassador underscored strong concern with Tariceanu's failure to consult with the U.S. prior to making the announcement. Ambassador also emphasized the valued role Romania has played in Iraq and expressed hope that this new debate would not lead to a premature withdrawal. Meanwhile, President Traian Basescu used a July 5 cabinet meeting as an opportunity to underscore his continued support for Romanian engagement in Iraq. Many Embassy contacts continue to assess that Basescu's Democratic Party (PD) plans to oust Tariceanu as early as this fall. End Summary.

12. (C) The Ambassador met the afternoon of July 5 with Prime Minister Tariceanu, the Ambassador's first substantial conversation with the PM since that the latter's June 29 announcement, made with the DefMin, proposing that Romania withdraw its troops from Iraq. The Ambassador had spoken briefly with Tariceanu on the margins of Embassy's July 4 reception, but that conversation was cut short by President Basescu's arrival at the event. Tariceanu made no reference during either conversation to what even his close advisors say is the underlying motive of the proposal -- an attempted political strike against Basescu. Rather, the PM couched his arguments in EU terms, and sought to provide verbal assurances that our bilateral relationship would not be affected in other areas.

Ambassador to PM: "Allies Consult"

13. (C) The Ambassador initiated the conversation with Tariceanu by noting strong concern that neither the Embassy nor any other USG entity had been consulted prior to Tariceanu and DefMin Atanasiu's announcement. The Ambassador

stressed that this was not the type of conduct expected from a friend and ally, especially one that had been so reliable and with which we have had such a strong consultative relationship. The Ambassador said that the announcement had led many in the USG to wonder if Romania was falling back on its commitments. He stressed that Iraq remained the single most important project for the U.S., and that stability and democracy in Iraq are important to Europe as well as to the U.S. The Ambassador also noted that some of our European partners had expressed concern with how Tariceanu had made the unexpected announcement -- at that particular moment Romania did not look very credible as a partner.

PM Tariceanu: The "Issue Needed to Be Raised"

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14. (C) Tariceanu did not respond directly, but rather described the withdrawal proposal as "an issue that needed to be raised." He added that "the time had come" to begin discussing a pullout of Romanian troops, as there appeared to be a clear trend at the European level for countries to begin reconsidering their commitments in Iraq. He said this had not previously been part of the public discussion in Romania, despite polling figures showing that a high percentage of Romanians oppose having troops in Iraq. He described his proposal as "delicate," recognizing it had hit a public nerve and clearly raised the ire of the president. But, he said, Romania must figure out a way to disengage from Iraq over "the next period." He viewed introducing the issue into the public debate as a first step in this direction, and claimed the PNL sought to seize the issue before it was raised by the extreme nationalist Greater Romania Party (PRM). Tariceanu asserted that the PRM would have "misused" and even gained votes from the issue.

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15. (C) Still expressing concern that the proposal had even been made, the Ambassador asked Tariceanu what he and his party planned next, given that the CSAT had voted down the proposal. Tariceanu said he anticipated parliamentary debate on the issue and, potentially, even a referendum. He believed that the CSAT would eventually have to reconsider its position when the level of public opposition became clear. Tariceanu emphasized that his "political" proposal did not mean that Romania should decide on the spot to withdraw from Iraq, without coordination with allies. Romania would need to follow all institutional procedures, particularly in the Parliament. He raised the possibility that Romania could begin withdrawal in January 2007, but that would not mean all troops would be removed at once.

16. (C) Ambassador underscored that Iraq remains an important component in the Global War on Terror and that Romanian troops continued to serve an important role in Iraq. The U.S. values this presence, which has earned Romania a reputation as a solid ally. Tariceanu expressed his view that most Iraqis do not want international troops in Iraq -- their continued presence raised questions about the viability of new Iraqi institutions. In this light, he said he supported continued training of Iraqi military forces and would even support an increase in the number of Romanian troops training their Iraqi counterparts.

17. (C) Tariceanu said that it was not his intention for the debate over Romanian troops in Iraq to spread to other issues. The PM stressed "we remain firmly committed" to our contributions to Afghanistan, where Romanian troops serve as part of a NATO mission. The Ambassador reiterated the importance of Iraq to the U.S. and Europe. Before leaving the meeting, the Ambassador again welcomed the decision by Basescu and the CSAT to retain Romanian troops in Iraq and urged consultation, coordination, and level-headedness now that Tariceanu and the PNL had launched this unfortunate debate on Romania's presence in Iraq.

Basescu and Opposition PSD Reiterate Iraq Commitment

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¶8. (C) Meanwhile, President Basescu has continued to underscore Romania's commitment to Iraq. During a cabinet meeting which adjourned immediately prior to the Ambassador's July 5 meeting with Tariceanu, Basescu reportedly reminded the government that Romania's engagement in Iraq is based on UN resolutions and a specific request from the Iraqi government. On the margins of the July 4 reception, he conveyed to the Ambassador that the situation appears to be stabilizing in Iraq and it would be great if "we could all pull out together in 2007."

¶9. (C) In addition, the opposition Social Democratic Party (PSD) issued a communique characterizing the PNL proposal to withdraw from Iraq as a "diversion" meant to turn public attention away from social problems confronting the Romanian population. The PSD, which was in power when Romanian troops were first committed to Iraq in 2003, reiterated its earlier call for an unspecified timeline for withdrawal from Iraq. PSD contacts continue to tell post privately that the party shares Basescu's view that the troops should remain for the time being and represent a central component in Romania's strategic partnership with the U.S.

¶10. (C) Comment: Although the volume of the debate over Romania's troop presence in Iraq has lowered somewhat in the past two days, it remains a point of contention to a degree unseen before the PM's announcement. Defense Minister Atanasiu -- who previously remained out of the limelight -- continues to make public comments pointing to the supposedly high cost of deployment as grounds for withdrawal. In response, presidential spokesperson Adriana Saftoiu has called on Atanasiu to resign and said both the PM and DefMin should have accepted formally the CSAT's decision to maintain the troop presence. Meanwhile, political analysts and politicians continue to ask how long the PNL-PD center right coalition can continue, given this latest blow delivered by Tariceanu. One junior PSD MP confided to PolChief July 6 that the party is already preparing to govern again, likely in coalition with Basescu's Democratic Party (PD) in fall or early next year. The MP did not offer further specifics, but the assertion shows that this outcome is in the scope of more than just the party's senior leaders. An increasing number of Embassy contacts have opined that they cannot see how Tariceanu can survive in office beyond the short term given that President Basescu is so clearly against him. End

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Comment.  
TAUBMAN